NFHA Conference Reflections
By Megan Confer-Hammond, 2018

My name is Megan Confer-Hammond, and I am the Program Director at the Fair Housing Partnership (FHP), which is based in Pittsburgh, PA.

NFHA’s 2018 national conference “the Fair Housing Act 50” was made accessible to me by providing sign language interpreters and CART, given that accommodation needs vary based on the environment. For example, CART is well-suited for stationary lectures and panels while sign language interpreters better convey NFHA’s slam poetry performances and are more adaptable for small group conversations and for accompanying me to Capitol Hill for meetings with members of Congress.

2018 marked the 50th anniversary of the Fair Housing Act. However, disability and familial status were only added to the Act as protected classes in 1988. In 1988, my deaf parents lived in the Washington, D.C. area, having attended Gallaudet University, a university for the education of the deaf and hard of hearing. In 1988, I was three years old, and my sister was born. In my lifetime, my family was vulnerable to housing discrimination of any kind based on deafness and the presence of minor children. On March 6, 1988, the “Deaf President Now” movement rocked Gallaudet University and Washington, D.C. This movement rallied around naming a deaf person president of the university for the first time in the school’s history.
As a result of this, on March 12, 1988, the Fair Housing Act was amended to include disability and familial status. In short, civil rights protections in housing on the basis of disability, as well as equal opportunities in all facets of life, is still new. Many of us lived during a time that the law didn’t protect us. The 50th anniversary of the Act providing housing choice for people with disabilities isn’t until 2038. We must still defend our hard-fought rights in order to choose our own homes and the lives that we live.

I started at FHP in 2009. My early conferences were inaccessible, and the self-advocacy required to gain access was exhausting. Knowing that the 2018 conference was fully accessible to me provided me with the relief and clarity I needed to fully participate in and be a part of the conference.

We fought and won in 1988 for our right as people with disabilities to represent ourselves. However, a law is only as strong as its enforcement. The Conference Initiative by JPMorgan Chase and WID gives people with disabilities an actual seat at the decision-making table.

Megan Confer-Hammond is the Program Director at the Fair Housing Partnership of Greater Pittsburgh, which is a Fair Housing Initiative Program (FHIP) under the umbrella organization National Fair Housing Alliance (NFHA). In her work, she advocates on behalf of people with disabilities and all protected classes. As someone who benefited directly from cutting-edge housing policy when she was a child, Megan is pleased to have a means to give back.

Megan as a Disability Ambassador